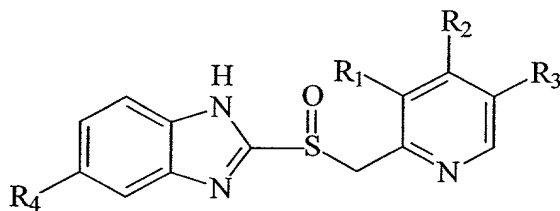


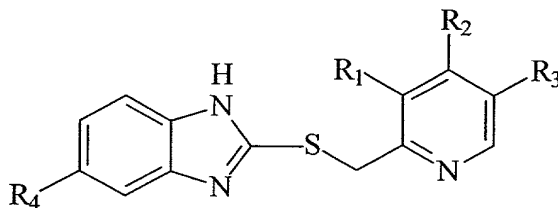
WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A process for preparing a thioester compound of formula A:



A

wherein R₁, R₂, and R₄ are each selected from the group consisting of hydrogen, substituted or unsubstituted lower alkyl and substituted or unsubstituted lower alkoxy; and R₃ is selected from the group consisting of hydrogen and substituted or unsubstituted lower alkyl, comprising reacting a thioether compound of formula B



B

wherein R₁ through R₄ are as in formula A, with an oxidizing agent to produce selective oxidation of the thioether compound of formula B to form the thioester compound of formula A.

2. The process according to claim 1, wherein the oxidation is performed at a temperature from about -10⁰C to about 30⁰C.
3. The process according to claim 1, wherein the oxidation is performed for about 2 hours to about 10 hours.
4. The process according to claim 1, wherein R₁ is methyl; R₂ is methoxy; R₃ is methyl and R₄ is methoxy.
5. The process according to claim 1, wherein R₁ is methyl; R₂ is 2-trifluoroethoxy; R₃ is hydrogen and R₄ is hydrogen.

6. The process according to claim 1, wherein R₁ is methoxy; R₂ is methoxy; R₃ is hydrogen and R₄ is difluoromethoxy.
7. The process according to claim 1, wherein R₁ is methyl; R₂ is MeOCH₂CH₂CH₂O; R₃ is hydrogen and R₄ is hydrogen.
- 5 8. The process according to claim 1, wherein the oxidizing agent is *tert*-butyl hydroperoxide in the presence of a catalyst.
9. The process according to claim 8, wherein the catalyst is selected from the group consisting of vanadyl bis-acetylacetonate, sodium meta-vanadate and vanadium pentoxide.
- 10 10. The process according to claim 8, wherein the molar ratio of *tert*-butyl hydroperoxide to the compound of formula B is in the range of about 1.15 to about 4.5.
11. The process according to claim 8, wherein the catalyst is vanadyl bis-acetylacetonate.
12. The process according to claim 8, wherein the vanadyl bis-acetylacetonate and the compound of formula B is in the molar ratio of about 0.01 to about 0.6.
- 15 13. The process according to any one of claims 8-12, wherein the oxidation is performed in an organic solvent.
14. The process according to claim 13, wherein the organic solvent is selected from the group consisting of toluene, lower alkanols and ethyl acetate.
15. The process according to claim 13, wherein the oxidation is performed in an organic solvent in the presence of water.
- 20 16. The process according to claim 1, wherein the oxidizing agent is Oxone[®].
17. The process according to claim 16, wherein the molar ratio between Oxone[®] and the compound of formula B is from about 1.25-1.6 to about 1.
18. The process according to claim 16, wherein the molar ratio between Oxone[®] and the compound of formula B is from about 1.4-1.6 to about 1.
- 25 19. The process according to claim 16, wherein the oxidation is performed of an aqueous organic solvent.
20. The process according to claim 16, wherein the oxidation is performed in the presence any one or more of acetone and methanol.
- 30 21. A process according to claim 16, wherein the oxidation is performed in about 5% aqueous methanol.

22. The process according to claim 16, wherein the oxidation is performed in a two-phase system selected from (CH₂Cl₂/H₂O) and (ethyl acetate/H₂O).
23. The process according to claim 16, wherein the oxidation is performed in the presence of phase-transferred catalyst.
- 5 24. The process according to claim 16, wherein the oxidation is performed in the presence of *tert*-butyl ammonium bromide.
25. Omerprazole substantially free of sulphone by-product prepared as in any one of claims 1, 4, 8 or 16.
- 10 26. Lansoprazole substantially free of sulphone by-product prepared as in any one of claims 1, 5, 8 or 16.
27. Pantoprazole substantially free of sulphone by-product prepared as in any one of claims 1, 6, 8 or 16.
- 15 28. Rabeprazole substantially free of sulphone by-product prepared as in any one of claims, 1, 7, 8 or 16.